

What makes a generation great?

By Maj. Jennings Gillem
8th Transportation Squadron commander

One of the things that has been nice about this past year is that I have had an opportunity to catch up on the latest and greatest books. While it did not take the place of reading Dr. Seuss' "Green Eggs and Ham" to my three boys, and it certainly was not my intention to bore you with a book review, I did feel compelled to talk about one book in particular.

Having just completed "The Greatest Generation" by Tom Brokaw, I felt like I could have almost written it myself. This was a book with a theme that I could definitely relate to. My father was in the military for 35 years and was part of this "Great Generation." A World War II and Vietnam veteran, his life was very much the same as many of the individuals cited in this book.

But what made this generation so great? Commitment, integrity, hard work, civic responsibility, love of family and country, courage, responsibility for oneself, duty and, honor to name a few. These were not just buzzwords to this generation; they were ingrained in their lives. My father never practiced them when it was convenient; he epitomized them daily. With him as my role model, I never had a problem distinguishing right or wrong. It was as plain as night and day.

When I entered the Air Force 15 years ago, he told me these words that I believe were from his West Point (U.S. Military Academy) oath. I think of them often as a commander and realize how profound, yet simple, they really are. "Help me to choose the harder right than the easier wrong." His generation didn't do things the easy way; they did what was right, no matter what the situation entailed.

This generation was by no means perfect though. Discrimination was still the norm. Interning Japanese Americans during World War II were

certainly some of the low points.

But back to what made it great, and my favorite example – my father. Here is a man that if he got too much money back in change from the store clerk, he gave it back. A man who recognized need, he would pick up a woman and her baby on the side of the road and took them to the store to buy them food and diapers. A man who was offered a mega dollar job with a major aerospace company, but quit after only a few months because he did not feel that his job as a consultant was worth all the money they were paying him. Instead, he went to work gratis by request of the mayor as interim chief of police in his local community after a scandal where the existing police chief was fired. A man who was married to the same woman for nearly 60 years.

Sure, I like to brag about him, but he was, and still is for the most part, typical of that "Great Generation." It's a shame that most of these individuals are dying by the thousands each year now. I only hope that I can pass on to

my sons the deep conviction and respect my father had, my grandfather a World War I veteran had, and I continue to have for the values I mentioned earlier.

Perhaps, more importantly, I hope that we as a society return to some of these core values. Today's "Baby Boomers" and "Generation X'ers" will define our future. While most of us have not had to endure a true depression or had to face a world war, I still believe that we have what it takes to carry on the values that were so well defined by this "Great Generation."

I am also firmly convinced that while it has to be a Team USA effort, we in the military must remain, and are expected to be, the leading role models for our great country, the glue that unites our nation, the ones who epitomize the values that are slowly fading away in today's society.

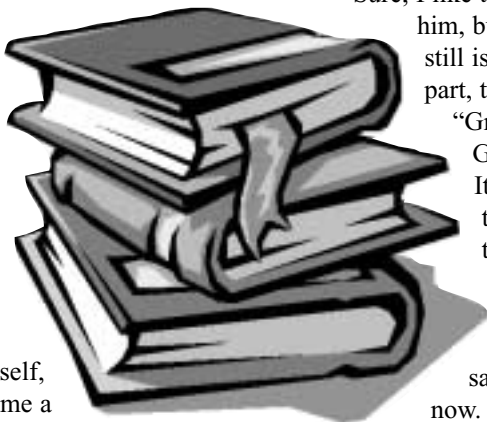


Photo by Senior Airman Lanie McNeal, 8th CS/VI

Canine cavities?

Maj. Mark Uyehara, 8th Operations Squadron, Dental Flight Deputy commander, performs a root canal on Uran, a 5-year-old K-9 patrol dog. Uran's handler is Staff Sgt. Marvin Fleeting, 8th Security Forces.

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Col. Burt Field
8th Fighter Wing commander

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Commissary manager.....	782-4144
Computer help desk.....	782-2666
Fitness center.....	782-4026
Housing office.....	782-4088
Inspector General.....	782-4850
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